

William Tavoulaareas

William Peter Tavoulaareas (November 9, 1919 – January 13, 1996) was a [Greek-American petroleum](#) businessman who served as President and [Chief Executive](#) of the [Mobil Corporation](#) in the 1970s and 1980s. He was best known for his libel lawsuit against *The Washington Post*, responding to the newspaper's [investigative journalism](#) articles criticizing him.^{[1][2]}

Early life and education

Tavoulaareas was the son of Greek and Italian immigrants,^[3] and was born in [Brooklyn, New York](#).^[4] He earned a [Bachelor of Laws](#) degree from [St. John's University School of Law](#).^{[1][5]}

Career

Tavoulaareas started as an accountant at [Mobil](#) (then Socony-Vacuum) in 1947.^[6] He held a series of financial positions until he was elected director of Mobil Oil Corp in 1965.^[6] On September 1, 1969, he succeeded [Rawleigh Warner, Jr.](#) as President of Mobil.^{[7][8]} He was elected director in 1976 and remained as President until November 1, 1984, when he was succeeded by Allen E. Murray.^[9] He remained on the board of directors until 1988.^[6] He had close ties to [Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani](#), and in his time as President, he helped Mobil grow from a revenue of \$7.6 billion in 1969 to nearly \$70 billion when he retired.^[10]

He was also on the Boards of [Aramco](#), Bankers Trust, Philip Morris, St. John's University, [Georgetown University](#), [Athens College](#), St. Francis Hospital, a Governor of New York Hospital, and served on the Boards of numerous charities both nationally and internationally. He was a [Knight](#) of the [Sovereign Military Order of Malta](#).

Atlas Maritime Company

In 1982, Tavoulareas was unsuccessful in bringing a \$2 million libel suit against *The Washington Post* for a November 30, 1979, front page story by [Patrick Tyler](#) saying he used his corporate position at Mobil to "set up his son" (Peter Tavoulareas) with a multi-million dollar management services contract with his shipping business, Atlas Maritime Company.^{[6][11]} The initial jury's award of \$2 million in favor of William Tavoulareas in July 1982 was put aside by the judge hearing the case, [Oliver Gasch](#), on May 3, 1983, because he said Tavoulareas had not proven "actual malice".^[12] The three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals upheld the verdict, 2–1. The full [U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit](#), including Judges [Kenneth Starr](#), [George MacKinnon](#), and [Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#), upheld the ruling in March 1987, finding the story substantially true and holding that "the record abounds with uncontradicted evidence of nepotism in favor of Peter [Tavoulareas' son]" and "insufficient evidence exists in the record to support a finding of constitutional malice".^{[6][10][12][13]}

The [U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission](#) (SEC) opened an investigation of the business relationship between William Tavoulareas and Peter Tavoulareas in 1977, at the urging of U.S. Representative [John Dingell](#).^{[14][15]} SEC investigators presented their findings in a draft memorandum in December 1980. The report stated that William Tavoulareas "participated in decisions" and was involved with Atlas "from approximately January 1974 through at least February 1976".^[14] [Stanley Sporkin](#), the departing director of enforcement at the SEC in 1981, stated he negotiated with Mobil's lawyers that there would be no punitive action against Mobil or its president, if they disclosed some of the findings. Ultimately, in July 1981, the SEC commissioners rejected the disclosure agreement set up by Sporkin. SEC Commissioner Philip A. Loomis Jr. argued that the SEC did not have authority to order Mobil to disclose that information.^[14] Representative Dingell and the [House Committee on Energy and Commerce](#) held hearings in February 1982 on the SEC's handling of the investigation of Tavoulareas, which included interviewing Sporkin.^[15] William Tavoulareas declined an invitation to those hearings, citing the ongoing lawsuit with *The Washington Post*.^[15]

William Peter Tavoulareas	
Born	November 9, 1919 <div>Brooklyn, New York, U.S.</div>
Died	January 13, 1996 (aged 76) <div>Boca Raton, Florida, U.S.</div>
Education	St. John's University (LLB)
Occupation	Business executive
Title	President of Mobil (1969–1984)
Spouse	Adele
Children	3
President of Mobil	
In office	
September 1, 1969 – November 1, 1984	
Preceded by	Rawleigh Warner Jr.

Personal life

Succeeded by	Allen E. Murray
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He married Adele. He had three children: Peter, William, and Patrice.^[6] He was known by his friends as "Tav".^[10]

He was a close friend of [U.S. President George H. W. Bush](#) and Greek Prime Minister [Andreas Papandreu](#).^[16]

Death

He died on January 13, 1996, at the age of 75 at [Boca Raton Regional Hospital](#) in [Boca Raton, Florida](#), where he lived in his later years.^{[1][2][6][10]}

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